



Committee: COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Date: TUESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2024

Venue: MORECAMBE TOWN HALL

Time: 6.00 P.M.

A G E N D A

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Minutes**

To receive as a correct record the Minutes of meeting held on 19 September 2024 (previously circulated).

3. **Items of urgent business authorised by the Chair**

4. **Declarations of Interest**

To receive declarations by Councillors of interests in respect of items on this Agenda.

Councillors are reminded that, in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, they are required to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests which have not already been declared in the Council's Register of Interests. (It is a criminal offence not to declare a disclosable pecuniary interest either in the Register or at the meeting).

Whilst not a legal requirement, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9 and in the interests of clarity and transparency, Councillors should declare any disclosable pecuniary interests which they have already declared in the Register, at this point in the meeting.

In accordance with Part B Section 2 of the Code Of Conduct, Councillors are required to declare the existence and nature of any other interests as defined in paragraphs 8(1) or 9(2) of the Code of Conduct.

5. **Enabling Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings - Consultation Response (Pages 3 - 9)**

Report of Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

(i) **Membership**

Councillors David Whitaker (Chair), Matthew Black (Vice-Chair), Suhir Abuhajar, John Livermore, Sarah McGowan, Jean Parr and Paul Stubbins

(ii) Substitute Membership

Councillors Gina Dowding (Substitute), Prof Chris Harris (Substitute), Joyce Pritchard (Substitute) and Jason Wood (Substitute)

(iii) Queries regarding this Agenda

Please contact Phillip Abel, Democratic Support - email pabel@lancaster.gov.uk.

(iv) Changes to Membership, substitutions or apologies

Please contact Democratic Support, telephone 582000, or alternatively email democracy@lancaster.gov.uk.

MARK DAVIES,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
TOWN HALL,
DALTON SQUARE,
LANCASTER, LA1 1PJ

Published on 27 November 2024.

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE**Enabling Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings – Consultation Response****10 December 2024****Report of Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

For the Committee to consider responding to the Government consultation on Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings published on 24 October 2024.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The Committee notes that:
 - (a) the Government is consulting on Enabling Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings, with a deadline date for responses of 19 December 2024;
 - (b) individual Councillors, political groups and members of the public may make their own responses.
- (2) The Committee is asked to:
 - (a) Consider making a response to the online consultation on behalf of the City Council, working through the 13 consultation questions reproduced at Appendix A of this report during the meeting;
 - (b) That, if agreement on a response cannot be reached at the meeting tonight, the response be agreed by email, following the meeting.

1.0 Consultation

- 1.1 On 24 October 2024, the Government's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published an eight-week consultation on enabling remote meetings and proxy voting at Local Authority Meetings. The Consultation is available online here: [Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings - GOV.UK](#)
- 1.2 The consultation is being carried to recognise that there are circumstances in which it may not always be possible for Councillors to attend Council meetings in person. With

that in mind the government intends to amend the law to introduce provisions for remote attendance at local authority meetings. In addition, the consultation seeks views on the possible introduction of proxy voting for those occasions when an Councillor, due to personal circumstances, may be unable to attend even remotely, for example during maternity, paternity or adoption leave.

- 1.3 The consultation seeks views on the detail and practical implications of the propositions to inform the Government’s ongoing policy development.

2.0 Draft Response

- 2.1 As the consultation is online, the appendix reproduces the questions and the choices that are offered online for the Committee to work through at the meeting with the Senior Manager, Democratic Support and Elections.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 The Committee is requested to consider making a response to the consultation. The questions are appended to the report for the Committee to go through.
- 3.2 If the Committee needs more time following the meeting to formulate a response, this can be done via email following the meeting, should the Committee resolve to do so.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
As this is simply a response to a consultation, no legal implications have been identified.	
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	
As above.	
OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces	
None identified.	
SECTION 151 OFFICER’S COMMENTS	
The S151 Officer has been consulted and has no comment.	
MONITORING OFFICER’S COMMENTS	
The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comment.	
BACKGROUND PAPERS Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings - GOV.UK	Contact Officer: Debbie Chambers Telephone: 01524 582057 Email: dchambers@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/ No

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

Add any further comments

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

Add any other comments that you have

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

Add any other reasons that it should be considered

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

Add any further comments you have on this question

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