

Meeting	Full Council
Date	26 th November 2024
Report Title	Enabling Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings
Agenda Reference	14
Author	Georgina Morgan-Denn Chief Officer/Clerk & RFO

Chief Officer's Recommendation:

To note the report and to consider a Council response to the Consultation before their 19th December 2024 deadline.

Background

This report analyses the implications of introducing hybrid meeting options for local councils in England, following the government's announcement to consider flexible meeting formats.

The analysis is based on the Society of Local Council Clerks' (SLCC) position and the government's proposed reforms.

Key Objectives

- Modernise democratic engagement while maintaining standards
- Remove barriers to increase candidate diversity in local councils

Advantages of Hybrid Meetings

1. Enhanced Accessibility
 - Enables participation from individuals with caring responsibilities
 - Supports councillors managing illness or disability
 - Removes physical barriers to attendance
 - Makes local government more accessible to diverse populations
2. Increased Democratic Participation
 - Broadens the pool of potential participants in local democracy
 - Enhances community engagement in decision-making processes
 - Allows for greater diversity in council representation
 - Matches successful flexibilities already implemented in Wales
3. Operational Flexibility
 - Allows councils to choose formats that best serve their specific communities
 - Provides multiple options for meeting attendance
 - Enables continuous governance during challenging circumstances
 - Modernises local government operations
4. Resource Efficiency
 - Potential reduction in travel time and costs
 - More efficient use of council facilities
 - Increased flexibility in scheduling meetings
 - Better time management for participants



Potential Challenges

1. Technical Considerations

- Need for reliable technology infrastructure
- Requirements for appropriate digital security measures
- Training needs for staff and councillors
- Potential technical difficulties during meetings

2. Meeting Management

- Complexity in managing hybrid participation
- Need for clear protocols for virtual and in-person contributions
- Challenges in maintaining meeting order across platforms
- Potential difficulties in managing voting procedures

3. Engagement Quality

- Possible impact on interpersonal dynamics
- Challenges in maintaining equal participation levels
- Need to ensure effective communication between virtual and in-person attendees
- Potential for reduced spontaneous interaction

4. Implementation Requirements

- Initial setup costs and resource allocation
- Need for updated meeting procedures and protocols
- Training requirements for staff and participants
- Ongoing technical support needs

Recommendations for Implementation

1. Develop clear guidelines for hybrid meeting procedures
2. Ensure adequate technical infrastructure and support
3. Provide comprehensive training for all participants
4. Establish clear protocols for voting and decision-making
5. Regular review and adjustment of procedures based on feedback

For more information

[Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings - GOV.UK](#)

To respond to this consultation

[Respond via Citizen Space.](#)

Conclusion

The introduction of hybrid meetings represents a significant modernisation of local democracy in England. While there are implementation challenges to address, the benefits of increased accessibility, participation, and flexibility appear to outweigh the potential drawbacks. Success will depend on careful planning, appropriate resource allocation, and clear procedural guidelines.

Proxy Votes

In addition, the government is also seeking views on the possible introduction of proxy voting for those occasions when an elected member, due to personal circumstances, may be unable to attend even remotely, for example during maternity, paternity or adoption leave.